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ABSTRACT

A study examined the teachers' manuals for five basal reader programs, kindergarten through grade six, to discover their recommendations for comprehension instruction. The series analyzed were "Pathfinder," published by Allyn and Bacon; "Reading 720," by Ginn and Company; "Bookmark Reading Program," by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; "Houghton Mifflin Reading Series"; and "Basics in Reading," by Scott, Foresman and Company. These series were chosen because of their current copyright dates and because they were leading sellers and were promoted widely. The analysis revealed that the manuals gave more attention to assessment and practice than to direct, explicit instruction. When instruction did appear in the manuals, the connection between what was being taught and how to read was either minimized or entirely overlooked. As a result, identifying referents for pronouns, distinguishing between fact and opinion, finding topic sentences, and similar activities became ends in themselves. One possible consequence is that children receiving the instruction will be unable to see the relationship between what is done when they read in school and what they should do when they read on their own. Finally, the large number of written exercises supplied by the programs might discourage children from wanting to read on their own. (FL)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Reading Education Report No. 26

READING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN FIVE BASAL READER SERIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the manuals of five basal reader programs, kindergarten through Grade 6, in order to uncover what they suggest for comprehension instruction. This was done to see whether what they offer might be similar to what was found in an earlier classroom-observation study. In the latter study, almost no comprehension instruction was seen when Grade 3-6 classrooms were visited; however, considerable time went to comprehension assessment and written exercises.

Like the teachers, the manuals give far more attention to assessment and practice than to direct, explicit instruction. When procedures for teaching children how to comprehend are provided, they tend to be brief. Such brevity is not unlike what was referred to in the report of the classroom-observation study as "mentioning." This was the tendency of the observed teachers to say just enough about a topic to allow for a written assignment related to it.

Other features of manuals that are similar to the teachers' behavior are discussed, and recommendations for change in these guidebooks are made.

Reading Comprehension Instruction in Five Basal Reader Series

Presumably, a classroom is a place where instruction is offered and received. However, in a classroom-observation study of the kind and amount of reading comprehension instruction that Grades 3-6 provide, a different picture emerged (Durkin, 1978-79). Instead of being instructors, the 39 observed teachers tended to be questioners and assignment givers. Since almost all their questions were an attempt to learn whether the children had comprehended a given selection or chapter, the teachers seemed more intent on testing comprehension than on teaching it. They were also "mentioners," saying just enough about a topic (e.g., unstated conclusions) to allow for a written assignment related to it.

With findings like these, it was only natural to wonder why something as important as comprehension instruction was slighted. Since basal reader materials are thought to exert a strong influence on elementary school practices, a decision was made to examine basal reader manuals, kindergarten through Grade 6, in order to see what they recommend for teaching children how to comprehend, and in the process, to learn whether a match existed between what was seen in classrooms and what is found in manuals. Basal programs published by Allyn & Bacon, Inc. (Pathfinder, 1978), Ginn and Company (Reading 720, 1979), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (Bookmark Reading Program, 1979), Houghton Mifflin Company (Houghton Mifflin Reading Series, 1979), and

Scott, Foresman and Company (Basics in Reading, 1978) were chosen for the analysis because each had a current copyright date and, in addition, each met at least one of the two following criteria: (a) a leading seller and (b) widely promoted.

Review of the Literature

Both before and after the manuals were analyzed, efforts were made to locate other studies of comprehension instruction in basal materials. Little was found, however. The best known analysis of basal reader programs has been done by Chall (1967); but unlike the present study, hers concentrated on beginning methodology. So, too, did an examination of eight commercial programs by Beck and McCaslin (1978). Their aim was "to study how instruction is arranged in the first two grades of elementary school for teaching beginning readers to break the code . . ." (p. 5).

Only four reports dealing with both basal programs and comprehension were located. One was a master's thesis (Davidson, 1972) whose goal was to learn how three series teach inferential comprehension in Grades 4-6. That inferential skills are sometimes defined but not taught, or are taught but not defined, was one conclusion. Whether defined or taught, this study indicated, they are always practiced through teacher-directed questions and short exercises.

The second report was another master's thesis (Allcock, 1972) for which three basal reader series (Grades 4-6) were studied in order to

see what they do to teach critical reading skills. According to this study, the selected series define terms, ask questions, and provide exercises. The author further concluded that the manuals overemphasize some skills with definitions and exercises while others are slighted or omitted.

In one part of another report, Jenkins and Pany (1978) described findings after looking at three series. "Specifically examined were the third and sixth grade level student workbooks and the teacher manual recommendations for teaching main idea and overall story comprehension" (p. 10). Results showed that "the dominant instructional procedure for reading comprehension is questioning. Thus, in basal series "'instruction for' and 'testing for' comprehension appear to be closely aligned" (p. 12). The authors continue, "It is tempting to conclude that comprehension instruction consists primarily of repeated testing with feedback" (p. 12).

The fourth study that was found, "Instructional Dimensions That May Affect Reading Comprehension," was reported by Beck, McKeown, McCaslin, and Burkes (1979). Although the purpose of their research was to identify in the lessons of two basal programs what is "facilitative or problematic for comprehension," findings and conclusions highlight what may be problematic. Features of lessons that the researchers question are the little attention that goes to new vocabulary, the unwarranted assumptions made about children's knowledge of the world, and the types of questions that are proposed for post-reading discussions.

Selections in the readers and the illustrations that accompany them are criticized, too.

To sum up, then, the three studies that have been done to learn what basal manuals do with comprehension foster the conclusion that they are generous in providing definitions, assessment questions, and practice exercises but very limited in what they propose for instruction. The one study that looked at the components of basal reader lessons supported the conclusion that all is not well in what basal programs do to teach children how to be proficient comprehenders of print.

Definitions for the Present Study

As was indicated in the report of the study of classrooms (Durkin, 1978-79), articles and books concerned with teaching comprehension provide no definition for "comprehension instruction." The survey of the literature done for the present study reached the same conclusion. Even in the three studies just referred to, in which the aim was to locate comprehension instruction in manuals, definitions are missing.

Definition of Comprehension Instruction

The definition of comprehension instruction underlying the earlier study of classrooms was used in the present research, since findings from the two were to be compared. The definition, revised for manuals, is:

> A manual suggests that a teacher do or say something that ought to help children acquire the ability to understand, or work out, the meaning of connected text.

The "doing" and "saying" referred to in the definition are assumed to be some combination of definitions, explanations, descriptions, illustrations, demonstrations, and questions. With the latter, only those that deal with the process of comprehending meet the demands of the definition. Questions focusing on its products are considered to be assessment. (Questions viewed as being instructive for a topic like inter-sentence relationships might focus on a paragraph and include: "What do you need to know to understand that last sentence? . . . Read the whole paragraph to see what 'Because of that' means . . . Where did you find what that means?" On the other hand, if "Why didn't the birds return?" is all that is suggested in a manual for the same paragraph, that question is thought to be assessment.)

Since connected text is the concern of the definition, attention to the meaning of individual words is not thought to be comprehension instruction, with the following exceptions:

1. Function words, homonyms, and homographs treated as text-dependent words;
2. Signal words treated as offering cues about phenomena (e.g., sequence, cause-effect relationship) that are revealed in connected text.

To be noted, too, is that the definition is concerned with efforts to teach children how to comprehend, not with factors that facilitate comprehension (e.g., world knowledge, motivation). Nor does it try to

impose any theory of comprehension on the data, since the purpose of the study was simply to describe what exists.

In order to specify the parameters of "instruction" still further, a few manuals were examined in a somewhat cursory manner before the formal analysis got underway. Four more guidelines for classifying manual suggestions resulted:

1. Headings for manual segments (e.g., Comprehension Instruction) should not be considered in classifying them.

2. Although definitions can be expected to enter into comprehension instruction, in and of themselves they do not constitute such instruction. More specifically, if fact and opinion are defined but nothing is done either immediately or later to show how knowing the difference between the two should affect how something like an ad is read, the attention is not thought to be comprehension instruction.

3. If a manual segment focuses on what writers do and why they do it but fails to deal with the significance of this for understanding written text, it should not be considered comprehension instruction.

4. Whenever a manual provides comprehension instruction about a topic that was covered earlier but adds something new that is judged to be significant for understanding connected text, it will be called "elaboration" (not "review") and will be counted as an additional instance of comprehension instruction.

Other Definitions

Before the manuals were analyzed, it was assumed that suggestions for comprehension instruction would be supplemented with others for application and practice. Also assumed was that at least some of the instruction would be reviewed. This called for three more definitions, which parallel those used in the earlier classroom-observation study:

Application

A manual suggests a procedure that allows for the use of what was featured in instruction. This is carried out under a teacher's supervision.

Practice

A manual suggests a procedure that allows for the use of what was featured in instruction. This is carried out by the children working independently.

Review of Instruction

A manual suggests that a teacher do or say something for the purpose of going over comprehension instruction that was offered previously.

It was also assumed that two other activities concerned with comprehension would be in the manuals:

Preparation

A manual suggests that a teacher do or say something that will prepare children to read a selection. Such preparation may include attention to new vocabulary, word meanings, background knowledge, and prereading questions.

Assessment

A manual suggests that a teacher do or say something for the purpose of learning whether a selection was comprehended.

The close connection between comprehension and study skills pointed up the need to identify the study skills instruction that manuals offer. It also created the need for another definition that corresponds to one used in the earlier study of classrooms:

Study Skills Instruction

A manual has a teacher do or say something that ought to help children understand content subject textbooks.

While whatever is done to teach children how to comprehend connected text should offer help with content subject textbooks, study skills instruction was conceived for this research as being more specialized, that is, attending to topics like interpreting graphs and diagrams, varying rate in accordance with the reader's purpose, and skimming and scanning. Omitted from consideration, on the other hand, was attention to locational skills because the research was not focusing on what is done to teach children how to find information but, rather, on what is done to teach them how to process it.

Review, application, and practice for study skills were defined in ways that parallel the definitions used for comprehension.

Procedure for Analyzing the Manuals

Every page in each manual of the five basal programs was read for the purpose of identifying and recording recommendations that matched

any of the six definitions related to comprehension and that matched any of the four for study skills. (Although manuals were the focus of the examination, readers, workbooks, and ditto masters entered into the analysis whenever suggestions for using them appeared in a manual.) Following the analysis of a manual, a second examiner checked all the examples of comprehension instruction, comprehension review, study skills instruction, and study skills review in order to see whether each met the requirements of the definitions. The few differences in judgments that occurred were resolved through discussion, which served to specify the parameters of the definitions even more.

As a further check, the second examiner went through each manual, randomly selecting pages to see whether any procedure that should have been recorded as being instruction or review had been overlooked. For the same purpose, the second examiner randomly selected from each series one manual in the Grade 3-6 range and read that manual page by page. The Grade 3-6 range was chosen on the assumption that middle- and upper-grade manuals offer more comprehension instruction than do those for the earlier grades, making it easier to miss relevant activities in the advanced materials.

The analyses just described took eight months. After they were completed, the first examiner read each manual in each series once more, this time looking only for comprehension instruction, comprehension review, study skills instruction, and study skills review. What was

found was checked by the second examiner; it was also checked against what had been identified in the initial examination. Now, 100% agreement was found for all the judgments.

In spite of the agreement, the study admittedly suffers from all the limitations of research that must rely on judgments rather than well-established facts. This needs to be kept in mind as findings are reported.

Findings: Frequency Data

The frequency of manual suggestions for the six categories concerned with comprehension (instruction, review, application, practice, preparation, and assessment) is listed in Table 1. To give meaning to the frequency data and, in particular, to show that doing more is not the same as doing better, comments about each category follow.

Instruction

Both across the five series and within each one, what was judged as being a recommendation that would provide comprehension instruction varied considerably in length. In one case, the recommendation might be one sentence long, whereas in another it might be fully developed with procedural details. Since the unit of analysis had nothing to do with length, each type of recommendation was counted as one example of comprehension instruction.

In examining the frequency data for instruction, it should also be remembered that certain recommendations were called comprehension

Table 1

Number of Procedures Related to Comprehension and Study Skills

in Five Basal Reader Series, Kindergarten-Grade 6

	Comprehension						Study Skills			
	Instruction	Review	Application	Practice	Preparation	Assessment	Instruction	Review	Application	Practice
Series A	128	346	436	693	328	328	13	31	39	61
Series B	122	158	253	746	429	393	9	23	22	42
Series C	98	418	538	832	335	335	8	29	34	27
Series D	92	121	303	662	491	437	15	15	51	33
Series E	60	85	111	495	346	346	13	11	33	59

instruction even when what teachers were to do was unclear. For example, what is the meaning of manual directives like: Lead the children to generalize that . . . Guide the pupils to conclude that . . . Help the students to understand that . . .? Or, what are teachers supposed to do or say when, in preparation for work with main ideas, a manual directs them to "Introduce the word idea"?

All this suggests what is common in the five series: They offer very precise help (e.g., obvious answers to assessment questions) when it is least needed, but they are obscure or silent when specific help is likely to be required. Even some of the specific help is of questionable value. For instance, first-grade teachers who say to children exactly what manuals tell them to say would use such advanced language as literal meaning, logical, infer, main idea, pause momentarily, evident, situation, refer to, and prepositional phrase. This may indicate that some authors of manuals are out of touch with younger children.

Review

Typically, suggestions for review in all the series are one sentence in length; consequently, they are also nonspecific (e.g., "Remind pupils that authors sometimes give clues to when things happen" or "Review that a comma suggests the reader should pause"). When instructions on how to review are specified, the suggested procedure merely repeats what had been recommended earlier for instruction.

This is true even of the series that explicitly promises "alternative lessons."

Important to note, too, is that the frequency with which topics or skills are reviewed appears to have no connection with their difficulty or their relevance for comprehension. Instead, the amount of review in all the series seems more like the product of random behavior than of a pre-established plan. In one series, for example, the use of commas to set off the person addressed is reviewed 20 times, whereas the need for a reader to vary rate to suit his or her purpose is not reviewed at all.

How review is spaced throughout a manual also seems to be the product of random decisions. Sometimes a topic is covered, then reviewed with great frequency. At other times, a topic is introduced, then forgotten either for a long while or forever. Like its amount, then, the timing of review does not suggest a carefully constructed, pre-determined plan for developing the manuals.

Application

Before the manuals were analyzed, it was assumed that a suggestion for comprehension instruction would be followed by one for application. In fact, such an assumption is made explicit in the definition of application referred to earlier. While this did not rule out the possibility of there being more than one instance of application for each instance of instruction, the large discrepancy actually found

between the frequency of instruction and the frequency of application was unexpected (see Table 1).

The large discrepancy stems from the tendency of all the examined manuals to teach by implication rather than by direct, explicit instruction. This means that if an objective has to do with drawing conclusions that are not stated by an author, manuals are not likely to offer an instructional procedure designed to teach children how to reach unstated conclusions. Rather, they are apt to provide teacher-supervised exercises (that is, application) in which the concern is to see whether children can arrive at them. If children are unable to do the exercises, all that is offered is more exercises.

Another example of application replacing instruction is on a page that urges teachers to read a certain paragraph aloud, after which the children are to be questioned about the sequence of events that the paragraph describes. Even though the paragraph contains signal words like first and after that, they are never referred to in the suggestions. (Nor is instruction about them offered earlier.) Instead, only assessment questions are provided. Nonetheless, the activity is explicitly described in the manual as "instruction for following a sequence." This example shows, then, not only how application replaces instruction but also why headings in manuals were ignored.

Since application is a type of assessment, it is important to note that the frequency data shown in Table 1 for application point to

one possible reason why the teachers observed in the earlier research spent so much time assessing. The same data might also help to account for the frequency of what that study called "mentioning": saying just enough about a skill to allow for an assignment related to it. Another possible explanation for the mentioning is the brevity of some of the manual suggestions for instruction.

Practice

As Table 1 shows, suggestions for written practice are even more numerous than those for application. Again, this reflects what seems to be the underlying assumption of the manuals: Children come to understand by doing, not by receiving direct, explicit instruction that is complemented with application and practice.

One characteristic of the many suggestions for practice is the use of brief pieces of text even when what is to be practiced seems to call for larger units of discourse. This characteristic means that if the concern is for something like making predictions while reading fiction, practice is likely to be with sentences, not stories. Consequently, the job for the children might be to connect sentences listed in one column (Suzie was cold) with sentences listed in a second column (Suzie went inside). Although such practice might help clarify the meaning of "making a prediction," its value for making predictions while a child is reading a story has to be questioned, especially since the manuals do not urge teachers to point up the relationship--if one

exists--between the practice exercise and reading a story in which sequence is important.

In addition to brief pieces of text for practice, manual descriptions of practice are also brief. Typically, too, one brief reference to practice is followed by another for more practice that focuses on something entirely different. The result is a large number of manual pages that flit from one topic to another. As an illustration, one page deals in quick succession with: word meanings based on context; finding titles in the Table of Contents that include a person's name; classifying given words under the categories fruit and meats; telling whether specified words have the same vowel sound; and writing a story using listed words. In still another series, one manual page refers to practice for: identifying words using contexts and sounds; distinguishing between main idea and supporting details; recognizing time order; interpreting figurative language; recognizing descriptive words; using dictionary skills; and getting information from diagrams. Ditto-sheet practice exercises accompany all the topics with the exception of the descriptive words. Why none is included for descriptive words is not explained.

Preparation

Traditionally, basal manuals offer suggestions to prepare children for each selection in the readers. They usually pertain to new vocabulary, background knowledge, and motivation. Since what is done

is meant to facilitate comprehension, the limited attention given new vocabulary, especially in the middle- and upper-grade manuals, was unexpected.

The series that offers the least amount of help explicitly assures teachers that, by fourth grade, children who have been using its materials will be able to figure out the pronunciation and meaning of all the new words with the help of contextual and graphophonic cues. To check out the likelihood of such independence, some new words were randomly selected, and the sentences in which children would first encounter them were examined. That the series displayed unrealistic optimism was the only conclusion that could be reached, since contexts are not always helpful and spellings are not always regular. Compounding the problem is the fact that many of the new words are not likely to be in the children's oral vocabularies. That manuals and teachers may need to do much more with new words before children attempt to read a selection is something that merits serious consideration.

Assessment

Before the present study got under way, it was taken for granted that manuals list comprehension assessment questions and, at the primary grade levels, that they provide page-by-page assessment questions for every selection. Unknown at the time was that questions appearing elsewhere in manuals also deal with assessment even though headings

and subheadings suggest that instruction or a review of instruction is being offered.

Based on this incomplete knowledge, a pre-analysis decision was to count the questions at the end of a selection plus any that might be offered for individual pages as a single example of comprehension assessment. This meant that no selection could be credited with more than one example of assessment. It also means that the data in Table 1 seriously underestimate the large amount of comprehension assessment that is in manuals. Had each assessment question been counted, Jenkins and Pany's (1978) observation that "the dominant procedure for comprehension is questioning" would have been abundantly reinforced.

Frequency Data by Grade Level

As was mentioned earlier, it was assumed prior to the study that Grade 4-6 manuals offer more comprehension instruction than do those for kindergarten through Grade 3. To show why that was an erroneous assumption, Table 2 organizes frequency data for instruction and review by grade level.

One reason for the sparse amount of instruction in the more advanced manuals is that their authors give frequent attention to location skills--how to find something in a dictionary, a glossary, an index, a library card catalog, and so on. They also use many pages to review topics introduced in prior manuals and to provide assessment questions. Authors of K-3 manuals, on the other hand, use a generous amount of

Table 2

Number of Procedures for Comprehension Instruction and Review, and for Study Skills Instruction and Review, in Five Basal Reader Series

	Comprehension										Study Skills									
	Series										Series									
	A		B		C		D		E		A		B		C		D		E	
Grades	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R	I	R
K-3	79	271	88	106	53	157	65	71	27	38	6	14	6	10	0	0	14	5	3	1
4-6	49	75	34	52	45	261	27	50	33	47	7	17	3	13	8	29	1	10	10	10
K-6	128	346	122	158	98	418	92	121	60	85	13	31	9	23	8	29	15	15	13	11

space to teach phonics, to promote highly expressive oral reading, and to provide large numbers of assessment questions, some of which--as both Chall (1967) and Beck et al. (1979) correctly suggest--can be answered by examining the numerous illustrations in beginning readers.

Further Discussion of the Frequency Data

Since the present study was prompted by an earlier one in which classroom observations were used to learn what is done to provide for comprehension instruction, it is relevant to ask, "Is there a correspondence between what the observed teachers did and what is in the manuals of five basal reader series?"

Although the frequency data reported in Table 1 cannot explain why the observed teachers spent their time the way they did, they are able to point to a close match between the teachers' behavior and the examined manuals. Both, for example, give considerable time (or space) to assessment and practice but very little to direct instruction. Since most manual recommendations for instruction are brief, a match also exists between that brevity and the teachers' "mentioning."

Because only five basal series were analyzed, a question might be raised about the correspondences just referred to, especially since the observed teachers used more than those five. Here it is relevant to refer to three of the studies reviewed earlier (Allcock, 1972; Davidson, 1972; Jenkins & Pany, 1978). All focused on comprehension instruction in basal manuals, but none used the same materials that figured in the

present study. Nonetheless, findings were similar. All three uncovered little instruction but much practice and assessment.

Until other research with basal reader manuals is done, it will be assumed that what characterizes the five series examined for this study describes other basal programs. Until further research is done, it will also be assumed that basal reader manuals help to account for the fact that little comprehension instruction was seen when classroom teachers were observed.

Findings: Content Analysis

Anyone interested in remedying flaws in basal reader manuals insofar as comprehension is concerned needs to know more than the frequency of instruction. Of equal importance is what the instruction covers. For that reason, the topics dealt with when manual segments were judged to be providing comprehension and study skills instruction will now be reported.

For purposes of reporting, topics are divided into 17 categories that were established after the analyses were completed. Since not all the categories are marked by totally distinct boundaries, some topics could be (but were not) assigned to more than one category.

Eight of the categories are listed in Table 3. The number of different topics covered by the five programs taken together is shown under each category. Also shown in Table 3 is the number of topics that each program dealt with. For instance, Series A provided what

Table 3

Categories of Topics for which Comprehension Instruction is Provided, and the Number Attended to by Five Series

Categories and Number of Topics for Each	Basal Reader Series				
	A	B	C	D	E
Graphic Signals (N = 41)	17	13	18	10	11
Signal Words (N = 19)	12	10	5	5	4
Language Functions (N = 14)	10	8	9	6	3
Possession (N = 5)	3	3	3	5	1
Anaphora (N = 5)	3	1	3	1	2
Less Than A Sentence (N = 20)	13	8	9	11	5
Sentence (N = 28)	13	15	7	8	1
More Than A Sentence (N = 14)	10	9	5	4	3

was judged to be instruction for 17 of the 41 topics that pertain to graphic signals.

Data for each of the eight categories will be discussed now. The remaining nine will be considered afterwards.

Graphic Signals

Written English is characterized by certain visual properties that offer information that is helpful and even necessary for comprehending connected text. As Table 3 indicates, 41 topics covered by the manuals were classified as relating to these graphic signals. Some sample topics are:

Exclamation mark suggests emotion or excitement.
Indentation signals new paragraph.
Stress indicated by underlining may alter meaning.

Lest anyone think that the judgments made for this study were based on excessively demanding criteria, it can be pointed out here that many manual recommendations for graphic signals (and for other categories as well) that are called comprehension instruction are one sentence in length. To be more specific, if a manual recommended that a period be described as something that shows where a sentence ends, that was called comprehension instruction. Although lean, the directive was judged to be both relevant and instructive since children do need to know how to tell where sentences end if they are to comprehend them. However, prior to being told about this function of periods, they need to be helped to understand what a sentence is. Manual authors overlooked this. That

children need to have some understanding of what a question is before they are ready to learn about the question mark was not recognized either.

All this is to say that what was counted as an instance of instruction about a graphic signal was not always dealt with in a way or in a sequence that made sense. Is it sensible, for instance, to offer instruction about an ellipsis (in this case, three dots) as early as Grade 1 (as did two of the five series) or as early as Grade 2 (as did two others), and then review that instruction 24 times? Or, for example, does it make sense to explain the function of italics after a selection is read in which italicized words appear? (It is characteristic of all the series to provide instruction after it would have been useful in comprehending a selection. If what is taught is then applied in the subsequent selection, the sequence would be more acceptable. That is not the practice, however. Instead, something else usually gets attention in the next selection.)

Why graphic signals receive so much attention in all the primary-grade manuals has to do with the great concern for stories in Grades 1-3. Going along with that concern is a constant stress on expression, sometimes treated as an end in itself. This is exemplified by the special attention given to the comma as something that signals a pause, not as something that keeps thought units together. Expression treated as an end in itself is also exemplified by the frequent recommendations in manuals to have children read aloud a given piece

of dialogue in order to show how it would sound if spoken with an emotion specified by the teacher--excitement, for example. While knowing how a character says something is, at times, important for comprehension, readers generally have to learn how it was said from information in the text (or from their knowledge of human behavior), not from a teacher and, commonly, not from such special graphic signals as italics, all caps, or underlining.

The amount of attention given graphic signals in the framework of expressive oral reading raises other questions. For example, do we want children to actually pause for a comma or to actually stress an underlined word when they are reading silently? Or, on the contrary, do we want them only to be aware of what graphic signals mean so that they can respond to them mentally in a way that enhances comprehension? If it is the latter response that is desirable, then what seems to be a taken-for-granted practice in primary-grade basal materials (much prolonged attention to expressive oral reading) needs to be re-examined.

So, too, does the taken-for-granted practice of dwelling on stories with beginners, which obligates manuals to attend to a number of graphic signals almost immediately (e.g., quotation marks, comma to set off person addressed). As a result, it immediately burdens children with trying to remember what they all mean. How they are taught sometimes burdens them with the need to remember their names. This prompts the question, Would attempts to learn to read be easier and more successful

than they now are for some children if the silent reading of simple, factual material took up at least some of the time that currently goes to reading stories aloud with much expression?

Signal Words

Like punctuation, certain words offer readers cues that can assist with the comprehension of connected text. Nineteen topics dealing with such words are dealt with in the examined manuals in a way that was judged to be instruction. To illustrate the kinds of topics assigned to the category "Signal Words," three are listed below.

Or indicates an appositive or an alternative.
As and like suggest a comparison.
For that reason refers to a previously mentioned idea or event.

One example of what was judged to be instruction with a signal word allowed for an observation that was pertinent not just for signal words but for the research as a whole: A manual procedure may be called comprehension instruction, yet not be instructive. To illustrate, one series deals with the linking function of and in a first-grade manual by recommending that children be told that and is used to connect two words. Following that, a list is to be put on the chalkboard so that the children can name the words being connected with and (e.g., Mary and John, up and down).

Although this recommendation was thought to fulfill the requirements of the definition of comprehension instruction, it is highly

unlikely that first graders can grasp the intended meaning of "connect." It is possible, therefore, that all they would derive from the recommended procedure is word identification practice.

Language Functions

In addition to offering what may be too difficult (or unnecessary), authors of manuals appear to forget that reading, not writing, is the concern. This is suggested by the number of comments in manuals that are more relevant for writers than for readers, some of which are about the next category to be discussed, "Language Functions."

Perhaps the best way to define "Language Functions" is to list some of the 14 topics that were classified under that heading.

> Details are for the purpose of communicating a clear idea or a picture.
>
> Caption aids in understanding an illustration or a picture.
>
> Sarcasm may serve to provide humor or insult.

Why what manuals say about the functions of language was not always viewed as being instructive for readers (or as being correct) can be illustrated with the series that recommends telling children that whatever is at the beginning or end of a sentence attracts attention. Elsewhere, the same series teaches that variety in sentence structure serves to keep a reader's attention. With another series, instructors would teach that short sentences can function to convey excitement. In still another, time goes to explaining that descriptive details make

sentences more interesting. What is important to note is that in none of these instances is anything done with the possible significance for reading (if there is any) of what is being discussed.

Possession

Knowing how possession is communicated (e.g., with of) is relevant for comprehending connected text; therefore, manual recommendations for any aspect of possession make up some of the comprehension instruction in the five basal reader series. As Table 3 shows, five topics were assigned to that category, one of which is the difference between the apostrophe of possession and the apostrophe in contractions.

As it happened, contrast used as a method for clarifying was rarely found in the manuals. (Teaching the meaning of and, for example, in contrast with the meaning of or seems like a highly desirable way to clarify the meaning of both; yet that is never done.) Also noticeable by their infrequent appearance in manuals are periodic reviews in which related material (e.g., different ways to show possession) is brought together so that the whole can be seen. Instead, the generous amount of review found in all the manuals tends to be of isolated learnings.

Anaphora

Comprehending connected text requires knowing the referents for whatever anaphora authors choose to use. As Table 3 points out, only

five topics that pertain to anaphora were covered; and none of the series deal with all five, even though anaphoric devices cause comprehension problems. What two of the series do with pronoun referents will be described because it exemplifies a frequently occurring pattern in all the series no matter what the topic is.

In several manuals, the two series suggest that teachers use certain sentences to point out that pronouns refer to other, previously mentioned words. This is immediately followed by application. That is, teachers are directed to use additional sentences that include pronouns in order to see whether the children can name their referents. And that is all that is done. No suggestions are made for what to do if children are unable to name the referents, nor are teachers encouraged to link what is being done with reading. Specifically, they are never directed to explain that understanding a sentence may require knowing who or what a referent is; and that if a mental substitution cannot be made for pronouns or for certain adverbs, rereading may be necessary. Instead, the recommendation constitutes a brief, isolated event in which a means (finding the referent) is treated as an end in itself.

The frequency of such events in <u>all</u> the manuals suggests the possibility that those responsible for preparing them do not believe it is necessary to explain to children exactly and explicitly how what is done during the reading period relates to reading. Nor do

they seem to think it is necessary to offer alternative teaching procedures, should the recommended one not succeed. Instead, the assumption seems to be that more (more of the same teaching or more practice or more assessment) will eventually get the job done. Perhaps these are assumptions that need to be re-evaluated.

Less Than a Sentence

Since all the categories discussed thus far have something to do with understanding less than a sentence, an explanation of the category "Less Than a Sentence" is in order. Again, presenting some of the 20 topics placed under this heading might be the best way to define it:

Difference between simile and metaphor is explained.

Expressions may have both literal and figurative meaning.

Differently worded phrases may have the same meaning.

One topic assigned to the category "Less Than a Sentence" (contextual help for word meaning) allows for attention to two other questionable patterns in all the manuals: They offer too little specifically informative instruction and, second, they do not encourage probing. In the case of contextual help for word meanings, only once do any of the five series recommend instruction that is specific. (In this instance, a manual deals with the possibility that a familiar synonym or antonym may define an unfamiliar word occurring in the same sentence.) At other times, attention to contextual help is as vague and circular as: The meaning of a word is sometimes suggested by the

context. The context sometimes suggests what a word means. Following these vague descriptions comes application and practice. Thus, teachers are to list sentences and are to have the children tell the meanings of specified words. All the while the concern is for right and wrong answers; consequently, teachers are not directed to probe with questions like: How do you know it means that? What words in the sentence tell you what it means? Why couldn't it mean _____ in this sentence?

Whether nonspecific instruction and too little probing prevent manual procedures from helping children when they are reading on their own is something that those who prepare manuals need to consider.

Sentence

As is shown in Table 3, 28 topics were assigned to the category "Sentence." Sample topics are:

Adding not to a sentence gives it opposite meaning.

Placement of comma in sentence can alter meaning.

Adjectives and phrases make kernel of sentence more descriptive.

What is done with sentences prompts more questions about some of the characteristic practices of manuals. One characteristic referred to earlier is their failure to relate what is done to reading. The neglect is further illustrated in what one series does with the grammar of sentences. What it does at the start relates directly to how to read, for it deals with topics like:

Finding subject may help in comprehending sentence.

Appositive adds information about the subject.

As the grammar instruction becomes more advanced, however, explicit attention to the link between sentence structure and sentence meaning is absent. Instead of continuing to relate what is being taught to how to comprehend sentences, manual passages switch to a technical treatment of grammar treated as an end in itself. In this case, turning a means into an end in itself--a very common practice in all the series, no matter what the topic--not only deprives children of information relevant for working out the meaning of complicated sentences, but also requires them to learn new terms pertaining to grammar. This might be unwise, especially for children who have to struggle to become readers even when a reading program stays on target.

Other topics assigned to the category "Sentence" also call for a comment. One described as "Gerund construction at end of sentence refers to subject" has to do with a well-developed instructional procedure designed to assist children in coping with a type of sentence structure that appears in a selection just read and that might cause problems. This manual passage is not only thorough and directly related to reading but also unusual. That is, even though the structure of sentences in basal reader selections provides natural subject matter for comprehension instruction, it almost never receives explicit, careful attention. This is the case in spite of the fact that, starting

at Grade 2, some sentences in all the readers are complex and probably different from anything children have heard in spoken language.

Two other topics, which are stated below, also call for a comment.

Placement of phrase may affect meaning of sentence.

Placement of phrase does not usually alter meaning.

One manual in a series teaches about the first topic shown above; later, another manual in the same series focuses on the second. What is important to note is that nowhere are the two opposite conclusions brought together and compared so that children can see when a change affects meaning and when it does not. As was mentioned before, one flaw in the examined manuals is an insufficient amount of review that allows for such syntheses. Perhaps another is an insufficient amount of coordination among the separate manuals that make up a series.

More Than a Sentence

Topics assigned to the category "More Than a Sentence" include:

A cause and its effect may be in separate sentences.

Elliptical sentence requires reference to previous sentence in order to be understood.

First sentence in paragraph may express its main idea.

Together, as Table 3 shows, the five basal programs deal with 14 topics in the category "More Than a Sentence." That 7 of the 14 pertain to main ideas hardly communicates the popularity of this topic, starting in Grade 1; for most of the attention given to main ideas was judged to

be application, not instruction. Why this is the case (and why what is done is of questionable value) can be explained with an illustration.

The early attention that all the series give to main ideas makes use of what they call "stories." One such "story" follows:

> Vincent asked Anne to take care of Blackie while he was gone. He asked his father to watch out for the gerbils. His mother would feed the canary.

Instead of asking children to state what they think the main idea is, several possibilities are presented. With the "story" above, three are offered:

Vincent is going away on a vacation.

Vincent is coming back from camp.

All the pets are leaving.

What this single example points out is what mars much of what is done with main ideas:

1. What is said to have a main idea does not always have one.
2. What is said to be the main idea is not always correct.
3. The multiple choice answers provided are such that only one stands a chance of being the correct one.
4. Stories rather than expository text are often used even though main ideas are much more characteristic of the latter than of the former.

Unquestionably, what is done with main ideas gives further support to what has already been identified as flaws: Basal manuals sometimes offer incorrect information; more frequently, they turn means into ends

in themselves by not relating what is being done to how to read. In the case of main ideas, only two of the five series ever suggest telling children that attending to main ideas helps readers remember content.

Expository Discourse

Even though expository selections are more numerous in basal readers than they once were, the next table, Table 4, makes it clear that the literary side of reading is still the dominant focus.

Topics for expository discourse for which instruction was provided include:

Nature of expository material.

Persuasive techniques.

Authors' explanations of the words they use.

Three of the five basal programs place some of their instruction about expository material in the children's readers, not the teachers' manuals. Whenever instruction does appear in a reader, it offers guidelines and advice about a given comprehension task--for instance, following the sequence of an explanation or being alert to an author's assumptions. Manual recommendations for reader-based instruction suggest that children read it either silently, or silently and then orally. Teacher interrogation is to follow, with assessment questions coming from the manual, the children's reader, or both.

Often, comprehension instruction in the readers is far superior to many of the teaching procedures in manuals. For the most part, for

Table 4

Categories of Topics for which Comprehension Instruction is Provided, and the Number Attended to by Five Series

Categories and Number of Topics for Each	Basal Reader Series				
	A	B	C	D	E
Expository Discourse (N = 21)	13	3	7	6	5
Study Skills (N = 21)	13	9	8	15	13
Procedural Discourse (N = 5)	4	3	3	2	3
Narrative Discourse (N = 75)	23	38	25	26	19
Poetry (N = 9)	4	4	0	5	1
Plays (N = 6)	3	4	4	3	2

example, the content is both specific and directly related to how to read. Sometimes, too, helpful pictures supplement the text. In spite of the good pedagogy, however, the content is often dense: Much is covered quickly. This suggests the possibility that only the children who already read well will profit from the reader-based instruction unless teachers do more than just ask questions about the content.

Why some instruction is placed in readers and, second, how decisions are made about which topics would be covered there, is not explained in any of the three programs.

Study Skills

Illustrative topics assigned to the category "Study Skills" are shown below:

Headings show organization of ideas.

Rate of reading should reflect purpose.

Interpreting a circle graph.

Skimming: attending to titles, subtitles, and illustrations in order to preview/review material.

Scanning: finding something quickly.

Although each of the five programs deals with skimming and scanning, inconsistency characterizes their use of the terms. More specifically, three use skimming to describe both kinds of rapid reading. The fourth series, on the other hand, defines skimming and scanning in its sixth-grade manual as they are defined above, even though at an earlier

level, skimming is used for what is later called scanning. The fifth series does the opposite. It begins with definitions that correspond to those listed above but, subsequently, uses skimming for what has been called scanning earlier.

It is possible that the above confusion merely reflects confusion about these terms in the reading profession at large. Even if that is the case, a series should at least be consistent with its own definitions. The lack of consistency points out again that the separate manuals that make up each series do not always combine into a well-coordinated whole.

Procedural Discourse

What the five series do to teach children how to comprehend directions was assigned to the category "Procedural Discourse." As is shown in Table 4, procedural discourse receives very little attention even though reading directions is a common need that can cause problems. Topics covered include:

Directions provide sequence and basic details.

Directions should be read through first to see what is to be done.

Following directions requires attention to sequence.

For whatever reason, the frequent need to make inferences when following directions (e.g., a recipe) went unrecognized in all five programs.

Narrative Discourse

Topics related to narrative discourse were so numerous that nine subcategories were established to get them organized. Sample topics for each of the nine are listed below. The total number of different topics for each subcategory is indicated, too.

Dialogue: (N = 7)

New paragraph for each speaker.
Who is saying something may not be noted directly.

Characters: (N = 14)

Author may tell about characters directly with adjectives.
How a reader would feel were she/he the character helps reveal how character felt.

Plot: (N = 21)

Events may be told out of order.

What is happening may come from clues rather than direct explanations.

Setting: (N = 6)

Setting may or may not be important to plot.
Setting and character's behavior may be related.

Mood: (N = 3)

Mood affected by setting, characters' appearance and behavior, and descriptive words.
Mood may change.

Perspective: (N = 4)

First-person narration revealed through use of I or we.
Third-person narration revealed through use of they, she, and he.

Structure: (N = 6)

Story has characters, plot, and setting.
Story is a problem, an attempt to solve it, and a resolution.
Subtitles divide story into parts.

Kinds: (N = 13)

Fable has animal characters, teaches a lesson, and is very old.
Tall tale is humorous through exaggeration.
Real and make-believe stories contrasted.

Author: (N = 1)

Knowing author's motive for writing may aid in understanding story.

Although opportunities exist in all the series to show how fiction should be read in comparison with what expository text requires, almost none are taken advantage of. One series that does attempt a comparison does so by saying that stories can be read more quickly and only once, whereas study reading has to be done slowly and, perhaps, repeated. While this is praiseworthy, the advice contradicts what all five series do routinely: first, encourage teachers to analyze fiction with numerous questions and, second, recommend that some stories be read as many as three times.

Unfortunately, when the manuals do give attention to subject matter that should help children learn how to comprehend narrative discourse, their suggestions are not always suitable for the target population. In one second-grade manual, for example, plot conflicts are treated in an excessively mature way, since 7-year-olds are not apt to understand

or be interested in, some of the struggles discussed: between characters and their environment; between values; within an individual. Nor are second graders likely to understand, or be interested in, subtle distinctions between a topic and a main idea, or between the subject of a selection and its theme. While none of these observations are meant to deny the value of literary appreciation, they are intended to suggest that some of the time given to quite sophisticated aspects of various literary genres might be better spent on other concerns that include new vocabulary, word meanings, and ways for working out what long, complicated sentences say.

Poetry

The total number of poems in the examined series range from 38 in one to 155 in another. As Table 4 points up, comprehension instruction for poetry is lacking or almost lacking in two of the five series. One of the two explicitly recognizes the scant attention and explains it by saying that excessive analysis and discussion hinder children from appreciating poetry. If this consequence is indeed the result of excessive analysis and discussion, one is prompted to ask, Why does this series, like the other four, analyze and discuss prose in such minute detail even when its content is thin and obvious?

Plays

Earlier in this report, a question was raised about the routine use of stories with beginners since such use obligates manuals to deal fairly

quickly with a wide variety of graphic signals. For the same reason, introducing plays as early as first grade is questioned because they, too, have physical features that require explanations. Since relatively few people read plays, it was surprising to find (see Table 4) that three of the five series provided more instruction for plays than for procedural discourse.

Additional Categories

The three remaining manual passages that were thought to offer comprehension instruction had to do with the categories "autobiography," "biography," and "diary." One of them directs teachers to explain that an autobiography is written from one perspective, which needs to be kept in mind when an autobiography is read. The second passage thought to be instructive for comprehension has to do with the possibility that parts of biographies may be fiction used to make the account more interesting. The other example of comprehension instruction focuses on diaries. While what is suggested comes close to being nothing more than a definition, it was still thought that what is said (e.g., that diaries contain emotional reactions as well as thoughts and observations) might assist children on those very rare occasions when they find themselves reading someone's diary.

Further Discussion of Topics

One of the many questions for which authors of basal readers provide no answer has to do with the way they decide what will be covered

in manuals and with what frequency. The lack of an apparent answer about priorities makes it natural to wonder why so little (sometimes nothing) is done with certain topics, whereas others are overemphasized.

In the early grades, for instance, all five programs assign great importance to expressive oral reading even though it is possible that the persistent attention may encourage children to conclude that reading is a performing art, not a thought-getting process. Main idea is another popular topic with all five series, even when the selection under consideration does not appear to have one.

When all the anaphoric devices that authors use are kept in mind (Nash-Webber, 1977), anaphora have to be classified as one of the underdeveloped topics. Why only one of the five series even recognizes, for instance, that adverbs are anaphora, is puzzling. Equally puzzling is why a topic that has as much practical value as procedural discourse won no more frequent attention than did one like the reading of plays.

Placed alongside the classroom observation research that prompted the present study, data about the examined manuals also make it necessary to ask, When do children get the help they need if they are to be successful with expository texts? In the earlier research, 106 hours of the observing was of social studies, during which time not a single instance of comprehension instruction was seen. Since, as Table 4 showed, not a great deal is done with expository discourse in basal

reader programs, it may be only natural that a large number of children have considerable difficulty trying to cope with content subject textbooks.

Some Concluding Comments

Even though the data that were reported in Tables 1-4 suggest variation rather than similarity among the five basal programs, analyzing their manuals did foster the impression that they are very much alike. Such a reaction is probably rooted in the fact that all five series share certain characteristics. Because what they share may keep them from doing better than they now do with comprehension, a brief review of some common features seems like an appropriate conclusion.

Unquestionably, one common characteristic is the tendency to offer numerous application and practice exercises instead of direct, explicit instruction. When instruction does appear in manuals, the connection between what is being taught and how to read is either minimized or entirely overlooked. As a result, identifying referents for pronouns, reading with "a big voice," distinguishing between facts and opinions, finding topic sentences--all these activities become ends in themselves. One possible consequence is that the children receiving the instruction never do see the relationship between what is done with reading in school and what they should do when they read on their own. The very large number of written exercises supplied by all the programs may also mean that they will not want to read on their own.

What writers do is significant for readers; however, another characteristic of the five programs is the tendency to treat what they do in a way that fails to pinpoint the significance. In this case, the characteristic means that instruction often stops short of being instructive for reading comprehension.

Even though anyone who is concerned about comprehension has an obligation to deal with its assessment, all five series seem to take this responsibility too seriously. Since all five also use assessment questions when what is really needed is explicitly informative instruction, the result is an amount of questioning in all the manuals that seems excessive. Noticeable by their absence, on the other hand, are attempts to explain what it means to answer a question, and what the possible strategies are for getting it answered.

Whereas all five programs are exceedingly generous with questions, not one provides an answer about the way its authors arrived at priorities insofar as comprehension is concerned. It now seems important to know exactly how decisions are reached about (a) what will be taught and when, (b) how each selected topic will be taught, (c) how often and when each will be reviewed, and (d) how much practice and what kind will be provided. Why some comprehension instruction is in the children's readers, why suggestions for reviewing a topic are usually identical to what is recommended for teaching it, and why manuals rely much more on application and practice to teach than on direct instruction are still other questions that deserve answers.

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Footnote

[1]The wording of the examples has been altered to avoid identifying the series, but the essence of the recommended procedure remains intact. This is the case throughout the report whenever specific illustrations are given.

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